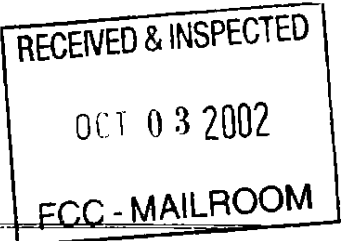


ORIGINAL



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Office of the Secretary of the FCC
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

EX PARTE OR LATE FILED

Subject: "EX PARTE COMMENT FOR DOCKET NUMBER 90-571 on NECA FUNDS" and "EX PARTE COMMENT TO DOCKET NUMBER 98-67 ON TRS/STS OUTREACH"

Dear Secretary

I live in North Carolina and am writing to encourage the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to strengthen the Speech-Lo-Speech (STS) outreach service in my state

Effective outreach is vital to make telephones accessible to people with speech disabilities (PSDs). When PSDs have appropriate training to use STS, they become more independent, participate more in the community, get jobs etc. The new relay regulations require states to contract with relay providers in such a way that relay is accessible to PSDs. Providing outreach appropriate to a particular user population is a way of providing access.

In California, people with speech disabilities have dramatically improved their lives because of STS. One example is Dr. Robert Aber who experienced great growth in his psychology practice once he was able to communicate with clients over STS. Writer Pam Hoyer advanced her writing career substantially using STS to gather facts for articles. Dr. Bob Segalman became successful as a social activist helping people with speech disabilities once he began using STS. STS potentially meets the telecommunications needs of thousands of people.

I have a very good friend who has CP and I'm hearing impaired, so you can only imagine the difficulty we have talking on the phone. With STS we have been able to talk often with each other. We don't get so frustrated with each other trying to communicate over the phone. I have found the STS phone assistants to be competent and courteous although they seem overworked. Maybe there are not enough of them trained.

Although North Carolina provides STS, I understand that call volumes may be very low. Call volumes could rise substantially with an extensive STS outreach service tailored to people with speech disabilities. Failure to provide appropriate outreach for STS likely means North Carolina residents with speech disabilities will not enter the mainstream of life.

Because I want this independence for PSDs in North Carolina, I strongly urge the N. C. Department of Health and Human Services to strengthen and intensify the North Carolina STS outreach service by making it similar to the very successful STS intensive outreach services in Minnesota to a lesser extent, in California


and Maryland. Minnesota's annual cost is \$120K. As our state population is somewhat greater than Minnesota's, the cost here for an effective STS outreach service will be \$192K.

Many states have sufficient telephone surcharge money to fund STS outreach service without difficulty. It may be possible to use vocational rehabilitation client services money to teach people to use STS as it fosters independence and makes people job ready.

Many people with speech disabilities have other disabilities as well making it very difficult for them to advocate for themselves. Thus, even though you may not hear from STS users directly, it is still very important to provide an effective STS outreach service.

Again, the cost will be about \$192,000. I strongly encourage the Department of Health and Human Services to provide such a service.

Sincerely



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